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Journals

On Marasmus

by

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Virginia

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James Miller

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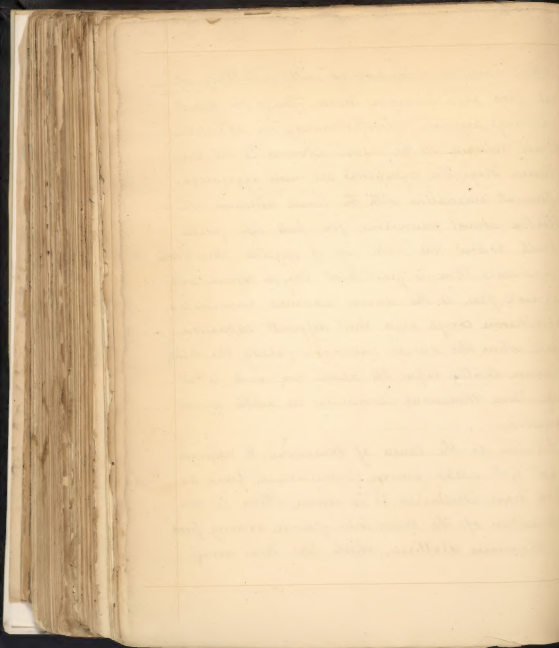
Marasmus. Comprehended under the general title of Marasmus a variety of symptoms have been laid down by authors.

Cullen defines Marasmus a wasting of the flesh with loss of strength, not attended with hectic fever. The objections that might be offered against this definition would be mere negatory, and if a better could be offered I am not aware that it would lead to any practical utility. I shall therefore proceed to give the symptoms of Marasmus occurring in early life. It would not be amiss here I presume to state that Marasmus is very properly divided into two stages, the incipient and confirmed.

Symptoms. It usually commences with a depravation of the organs subservient to the Digestive, Assimilating, and Nutritive functions, Hence follow Lethargy and debility, the abdomen swells, frequently pain about Umbilicus, and not unfrequently pain in the head is felt; though it is often attended, with costiveness and a voracious appetite. It at

other times is accompanied with a loathing of all food and Diarrhoea ensues. Though the stools are very frequent, notwithstanding the abdomen is not relieved. As the disease advances to the confirmed stage, the symptoms are more aggravated. General emaciation with the tumid abdomen, the bloated almost oedematous face, pale lips, foetid breath, sallow hue, with loss of appetite. When fever supervenes there is great thirst, tongue covered with a dark fur, as the disease advances sometimes a troublesome cough and short difficult respiration, and when the disease terminates fatally the child becomes shortly before its death too weak to sit up. Thus, Marasmus terminates in death if not arrested.

Relative to the Causes of Marasmus; It appears not yet settled among practitioners. Some authors have attributed it to worms, others to an obstruction of the mesenteric glands, arising from a stumous diathesis, which has been very



satisfactorily demonstrated by defections. These are not the only causes of Marasmus. It most frequently originates from a torpid or vitiated state of the alimentary canal. The passage of the feces is obstructed, which induces the dreadful odour of the mouth and breath, and likewise causes the depraved state of the stomach, which becomes disqualified for discharging its duty, and thereby presents a sufficient supply of nourishment. Thus languor from inanition ensues, attended with all the disorders incident to the case. I am sorry that it has never been in my power to witness the morbid appearance of Marasmus on defection. Every case which I have seen terminated favourably. My friend Mr Gwathmey has favoured me with a case which he had an opportunity of examining. The Conglobate glands of the Mesentery were in this case much enlarged and inflamed, the hardened lymphatic vessels connecting them were very distinctly felt between the fingers, in the

intestines nothing very remarkable was to be observed, they were pale, and contained a small quantity of feculent matter in the lower portion. The liver was a little increased in size, of a pale yellow colour. The spleen was considerably enlarged. Not the slightest portion of adipose matter could be discovered in the whole cavity of the abdomen. The Lymphatic glands in the Thorax were enlarged and hardened, the chain continuing up the neck. The Lungs much inflamed and adhering to the parietes of the Thorax in various places. This case arose no doubt from a stumorous diathesis of the system. Though I am thoroughly convinced that Marasmus most frequently arises from a vitiated state of the alimentary canal. The slightest attention to the history of Marasmus I think is sufficient to evince that colic precedes and accompanies the other symptoms. This disease is confined more especially to children and makes its attack about the time they are weaned. Those that are of a weak and infirm habit are

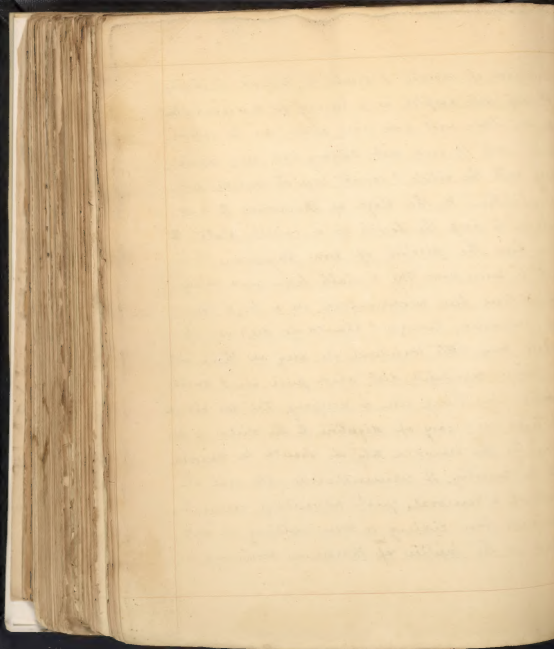
most apt to be associated with this disease. Children
also are more subject to Marasmus when congen-
ital in its origin. It is generally met
with it in the ~~marasmus~~ ^{marasmus} of infancy. It is an
consequence of the ~~marasmus~~ ^{marasmus} of infancy. It is an
which children are subject. It is an
disease depending upon debility, were induced to
place their whole dependence on the use of Jones
They were observed under the impression that this
disease was the same as the ~~marasmus~~ ^{marasmus} of infancy. It is an
constitution and it was in general to be met
and such operations were not so successful
It was seen in many cases in Marasmus would
usually arise from a debility of the digestive and the
function. In the first stage the patient was not so com-
pletely prostrated as in the second and the third
stage. It is obviously if called to a patient in this
stage the best indication is to remove the ac-
cumulated mass of feculent matter in the bowels.

for this purpose I know nothing superior to Calomel either alone or in combination with Calap.
After having evacuated the bowels it then becomes necessary to keep them in a soluble state, which may be done by any of the mild Laxatives, when convalescence has commenced a mild and nourishing diet constitutes the most effectual tonic that can be administered, I have found this stage of Marasmus to yield under the treatment which I have detailed, and I believe this disease as easy to cure as any which affects Children. But should Marasmus be neglected in the incipient stage or improperly treated it soon runs into the confirmed stage, which is more embarrassing to the physician. It is now necessary to call to mind the torpid state of the intestines, and that we have to remove indurated and fetid feces which have been accumulated probably for months. To awaken the sensibility of the intestines, and discharge them of these noxious contents. It becomes necessary to

Commence a regular system of purging. But suppose the disease does not arise from the cause which I have ascribed it to let us suppose to be the origin as some have supposed the practice which I recommend is not improper, purgatives are among the most efficacious we possess, or should the disease arise from a morbid condition of the Mesenteric glands the same class of remedies is decidedly the best deobstruents and may be employed with unequivocal advantage whatever be the pathology that is entertained of Marasmus I am not aware that any injury would result in the treatment. I have observed that the leading indication here was purging, which should be persevered in for some time. In order to receive information of the progress of the disease I have recommended to inspect what is passed at stool in the night and the appearance of the person in a session of the progress we make in one case.

I should be induced to use purgatives until the
fever resumed the normal appearance in which
at this stage of the disease we would naturally sup-
pose to be very feeble and the propriety of purgative
might be questioned: not only from my own experi-
ence do I contend for the matter. But I believe it
is now universally admitted among practitioners
that the bile will daily improve in health and
strength from the administration of an active
cathartic every other day. The Purgative which
we can not use in this stage of the disease -
has been Calomel and Jalap until the bowels have
been fully copiously evacuated. After which the
best Magnesia, and not charcoal be well ad-
ministered after the exhibition of the active purgative
it certainly operates very gently on the bowels
and seems to be well calculated to obviate con-
stipation. Dr Chapman states that it produces con-
siderable tonic powers and especially on the stom-
achary canal. reasoning on the general propo-

properties of charcoal, I should be inclined to think
it very well adapted as a remedy in Marasmus. But
as my time will not now allow me to experi-
ment with it, and not having had any experi-
ence with the article I cannot urge its consideration
any further. In this stage of Marasmus, it is ne-
cessary to keep the bowels in a soluble state. It
has been the practice of some Physicians to re-
sort to Iodine now. The vegetable bitter and chaly-
beates have been recommended in a high tone-
of confidence, though I should be disposed to
place very little confidence in any of them, with
a proper regulated diet, and pure air I doubt
whether anything else is necessary. The diet should
be light and easy of digestion, & the child is liv-
ing in the crowded city, it should be removed
to the country. If circumstances will not ad-
mit of a removal, great advantage may be
derived from riding or even walking it out.
Such is the practice ⁱⁿ of Marasmus occurring in



Children, and I have great assurance of the
success attending it. In the almshouse of Phil-
adelphia there has occurred about twenty cases
in the course of the last 18 Months and only
one or two terminated fatally.

To the professors of the University, under whom -
auspices I have been educated, in taking my
adieu, I return ~~these~~ my sincere thanks for the
many advantages which I trust I have derived
and may they enjoy long life and happiness.

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